

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY NICOSIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4225

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 NICOSIA 2504

NODIS

FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

E. O. 11652: XGDS-3

TAGS: PFOR LE

SUBJECT: POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF CHRISTIAN LEBANON

REF: NICOSIA 2491

1. CHRISTIAN LEBANON IS RULED BY THREE POLITICAL GODFATHERS -- FRANGIEH, CHAMOUN AND GEMAYEL. THEY CONTROL THE GUNS, THE MILITIAS AND THE ECONOMY BY VIRTUE OF PERSONAL TOUGHNESS AND THE TRADITIONAL LOYALTIES OF CLAN AND REGION. AT THEIR SIDE IS PERE KASSIS, THE FORCEFUL MONK WHO HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A SYMBOL OF RESURGENT LEBANESE NATIONALISM AND WHO, BY IDEOLOGICAL FERVOR AND FORCE OF CHARACTER, HAS AN ACKNOWLEDGED IF UNCERTAIN INFLUENCE ON THE THREE STRONGMEN. KASSIS'S POSITION HAS BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY ENHANCED BY THE WEALTH WHICH HAS BEEN PLACED AT HIS DISPOSAL BY RELIGIOUS ORDER AND WHICH WAS USED BY CHRISTIAN LEBANON DURING ITS DARKEST HOURS. HE IS TO SOME EXTENT A CONTROVERSIAL FIGURE, PARTICULARLY IN THE MIND OF THE MARONITE PATRIARCH KHURAYSH, HIS NOMINAL SUPERIOR, WHO IS DISTURBED BY THE PRIEST'S POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT.

2. THE OFFICE OF THE MARONITE PATRIARCH IS RESPECTED BY MOST. HE IS A MODERATING INFLUENCE BUT NOT A STRONG ONE. HE HAS NOT BEEN IN OFFICE LONG ENOUGH TO EXERT THE FULL

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MORAL WEIGHT OF HIS OFFICE AND HE IS TOO OLD, TOO DISCURSIVE

AND TOO MODERATE TO HAVE MUCH INFLUENCE ON THE POSITIONS OF THE TOUGH, SEASONED AND POLITICALLY POWERFUL CHRISTIAN LEADERS.

3. WAITING IN THE WINGS IS ELIAS SARKIS, THE FUTURE PRESIDENT OF LEBANON AND THE HOPE FOR THOSE WHO SEEK A NEW BEGINNING AND A WAY OUT OF THE PRESENT STRIFE. A LONELY, INTELLIGENT AND SENSITIVE MAN, SARKIS MUST PLAY A DELICATE BALANCING GAME IF HIS POTENTIAL AUTHORITY IS TO BECOME THE FULCRUM AROUND WHICH THE LATENT FORCES OF MODERATION AND REFORM CAN TURN. OUTWARDLY AT LEAST, EVEN THE AMBITIOUS CHAMOUN ADHERES TO THE CONSENSUS THAT SARKIS WILL BECOME PRESIDENT OF LEBANON ON SEPTEMBER 23, WITH OR WITHOUT A MEETING OF THE LEBANESE PARLIAMENT FOR THE PURELY CEREMONIAL ACT OF TAKING THE OATH. THE QUESTION IS, WILL THE PRESIDENCY BE A MEANINGFUL OFFICE OR MERELY A PATHETIC REMINDER THAT LEBANON ONCE HAD A CENTRAL GOVERNMENT?

4. THESE FIVE MEN -- FRANGIEH, SARKIS, CHAMOUN, GEMAYEL, AND KASSIS -- WITH A NOD TO THE RELATIVELY WEAK AUTHORITY OF THE MARONITE PATRIARCH, ARE THE MEN WE MUST DEAL WITH IN CHRISTIAN-HELD LEBANON. WE HALF EXPECTED TO FIND A BEVY OF OTHER, YOUNGER LEADERS VYING FOR POSITION AND SEEKING TO PROFIT FROM PAST MISTAKES OF THEIR ELDERS. TO THE EXTENT WE COULD DETERMINE FROM SO SHORT A VISIT, THE YOUNGER MEN AND WOMEN HAVE RALLIED AROUND THE ESTABLISHED LEADERS OF THE PARENTS' GENERATION AND ARE NOT LIKELY TO CHALLENGE (ALTHOUGH MANY CRITICIZE) TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AS LONG AS THE PRESENT CONFLICTS PERSISTS.

5. ONE OF THE OBVIOUS DIFFICULTIES IN DEALING WITH THE CHRISTIANS IS THAT IN A SENSE THEIR LEADERSHIP IS COLLEGIAL. PRESIDENT FRANGIEH IS RECOGNIZED AS THE LEGITIMATE PRESIDENT, BUT WITH GEMAYEL AND CHAMOUN HAVING THEIR OWN MILITIAS, FRANGIEH'S WORD IS NOT NECESSARILY LAW. CONSEQUENTLY POSITIONS MUST BE AGREED UPON BY ALL IF ONE IS TO HAVE CONFIDENCE THAT IT REPRESENTS ALL THE CHRISTIANS. OUR IMPRESSION IS THAT THEIR BASIC POSITION TOWARDS THE PALESTINIANS DIFFERS ONLY SLIGHTLY. NONE OF THESE LEADERS,

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NOR FOR THAT MATTER ANYONE TO WHOM WE SPOKE, WILL ADMIT TO FAVORING A PARTITION OF LEBANON. THEIR GOAL IS A UNIFIED LEBANON PURGED OF THE PALESTINIANS AS AN ARMED FORCE WHICH CAN PLAY A ROLE IN LEBANESE POLITICS. SARKIS -- THE WEAKEST OF THE MAJOR LEADERS IN THE SENSE THAT HE HAS NO TROOPS OR POLITICAL BASE -- IS PROBABLY THE ONLY ONE WITH A "MODERN" OUTLOOK AND A VISION OF WHAT LEBANON MUST BECOME IF IT IS TO BE REUNITED.

6. THE OTHER LEADERS PROBABLY HAVE THEIR CONCEPTION OF WHAT THEY WANT LEBANON TO BE, ALTHOUGH FRANGIEH AND CHAMOUN SHARED THEIR CONCEPTS WITH UN ONLY TO THE EXTENT THEY FELT IT USEFUL. ON THE OTHER HAND, PIERRE GEMAYEL IS A POLITICAL PRIMITIVE IN THE SENSE THAT HOWEVER NAIVE HIS IDEAS HE CONVEYS THEM FROM THE HEART, WITHOUT ARTIFICE OR GUILF. HIS AUSTERE DEVOTION TO THE MARONITE CAUSE AND HIS SIMPLISTIC CONVICTION THAT THE "ENEMIES OF LEBANON" ARE A MERE FIVE PERCENT OF THE MUSLIMS AND PALESTINIANS WHO ARE CONTROLLED BY THE SOVIET UNION IS ONE SIDE OF HIS PERSONALITY. THIS ASPECT IS TEMPERED, HOWEVER, BY HIS SYMPAHY FOR THE HUMAN SUFFERING ON BOTH SIDES AND BY HIS PRAGMATIC REALIZATION OF THE PROBABLE LIMITS OF SYRIAN SUPPORT. IT IS NOTEWORTHY THAT GEMAYEL AND HIS SONS ARE MORE WILLING THAN OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS TO MAINTAIN CONTACTS WITH THE PALESTINIANS, DESPITE SHEIKH PIERRE'S CONSISTENT OPPOSITION OVER THE YEARS TO PALESTINIAN POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN LEBANON. GEYMAEL, DESPITE THE HISTORY OF THE PHALANGE, APPEARS TO BE THE MOST MODERATE OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS. HIS MODERATION, HOWEVER, MAY BE MEANINGLESS. CHAMOUN IS MUCH SMARTER AND, IN THE COLLEGIAL COUNCILS, BECAUSE OF HIS INTELLECT, EXERTS THE STRONGEST INFLUENCE.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4226

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 NICOSIA 2504

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FOR THE SECRETARY FROM HOUGHTON AND MACK

7. CAMILLE CHAMOUN IS SMART, POLITICALLY SHREWD, TOUGH AND THE "HAWK" OF THE GROUP. HIS IS PROBABLY IN POLITICAL

TERMS THE ABLEST AMONG THE LEADERS, BUT HE IS ALSO THE ONE WHOSE PERSONAL AMBITION HAS THE HEAVIEST INFLUENCE ON HIS COURSE OF ACTION. HE IS ALSO THE MOST VENAL. IT IS GENERALLY THOUGHT THAT HE IS PROFITING FROM THE WAR IN VARIOUS MATERIAL WAYS. IN OTHER WORDS, HE MAY BE AND PROBABLY IS THE LEAST TRUSTWORTHY OF THE GROUP TO DEAL WITH. IT IS CERTAIN THAT CIVIL WAR HAS STRENGTHENED HIS POSITION AMONG THE TOP LEADERS. HE IS ABLE TO BE THE HAWK IN DISTINCTION TO GEMAYEL'S MORE MODERATE IMAGE, AND HE IS ALL THE CLOSER TO THE BELEAGUERED FRANGIEH. THERE ARE INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, THAT FRANGIEH IS CONCERNED BY CHAMOUN'S CLOSENESS TO HIM AND IS FORMING HIS OWN PARTY IN ORDER TO BECOME MORE INDEPENDENT OF CHAMOUN.

8. SULEIMAN FRANGIEH IS DETERMINED TO COMPLETE A NORMAL TERM AS PRESIDENT AND WILL INSIST ON HIS PEROGATIVES UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE OF HIS PRESIDENCY. THE OTHERS WILL NOT DENY HIM THIS ROLE. HOWEVER PETTY, QUERULOUS OR LIMITED INTELLECTUALLY, IT WOULD BE FOLLY FOR US TO SEEK TO SPLIT THE OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS AWAY FROM HIM.

9. FRANGIEH, ECHOED LATER BY PERE KASSIS IN CAREFUL ORCHESTRATION, STRESSED TO US HIS DISPLEASURE THAT OUR VISIT HAD BEEN ANNOUNCED AS MEETING WITH "CHRISTIAN
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LEADERS" RATHER THAN WITH "THE LEGITIMATE GOVERNMENT." FRANGIEH IS ALSO EXTREMELY SENSITIVE TO THE FACT THAT THE LATE AMBASSADOR MELOY'S FIRST CALL IN CHRISTIAN-HELD LEBANON WAS GOING TO BE ON PRESIDENT-ELECT SARKIS.

10. WE HAVE DESCRIBED THE ROLE OF EACH OF THESE LEADERS BECAUSE OF OUR CONVICTION THAT WE MUST DEAL WITH ALL OF THEM IF WE ARE TO BE SUCCESSFUL. IF ANY ONE OF THEM COMES FORWARD TO SPEAK FOR THE OTHERS, WE WOULD BE WISE TO HAVE THEIR ASSURANCE THAT THIS ROLE AS SPOKESMAN IS ACCEPTED BY THE OTHERS.

11. P.S. WE HAVE DISCUSSED ONLY THE MARONITES BECAUSE THEY ARE THE ONES WHO ARE PROVIDING THE LEADERSHIP OF THE CHRISTIANS AS THEY HAVE IN THE PAST, DESPITE THE REPORTEDLY ALMOST EQUIVALENT SIZE OF THE COMBINED GREEK ORTHODOX AND GREEK CATHOLIC COMMUNITIES. ACCORDING TO ONE OF OUR CONTACTS, THE GREEK ORTHODOX, BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN TRADITIONALLY CLOSER TO THE MOSLEMS THAN THE MARONITES, COULD PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE EVENTUALLY IN THE RECONCILIATION OF THE TWO COMMUNITIES. AT THE MOMENT, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT AS COMMUNITIES THEY ARE PLAYING ANY SIGNIFICANT ROLE. THE SAME APPLIES TO THE ARMENIANS, WHO HAVE ONLY A SMALL COMMUNITY AND WERE

FORCED IN THE FIGHTING OVER NEBAA (A NEIGHBORHOOD IN
EAST BEIRUT) TO ABANDON THEIR TRADITIONAL NEUTRALITY AND
ALLY WITH THE MARONITES.
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